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PROGRAM 20/20

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SUBJECT The Shadrin Case

BARBARA WALTERS: We begin tonight with a spy mystery involving a double agent caught in a bind. You'll see how the cold war is really being fought and how the intelligence community really operates.

HUGH DOWNS: You know, you mentioned cold war, and we tend to think of it as a war of words, of propaganda, the kind of stuff that we're hearing now out of Moscow, with the Communist Party's Congress going on. But tonight Tom Jarriel is going to take us to the front lines of the cold war, where real spies risk their lives.

TOM JARRIEL: It began as a love story. Dashing Soviet Navy captain falls in love with dark-eyed Polish girl. And they flee by open boat across the stormy Baltic Sea to sanctuary in the West.

And it ended on an equally dramatic note, as a spy story, on the cold dark streets of Vienna in December in 1975, as the Soviet-defector-turned-American-double-agent disappeared into the night without a trace.

EWA SHADRIN: With each passing minute, I felt worse and worse. And by one o'clock I just knew something, something bad happened, terrible happened.

JARRIEL: Vienna, a magnificent city. Also a snake pit of international espionage. Here, a man vanished, opening one of the most complex and cold-blooded chapters in the history of American intelligence-gathering. Unexplained for ten years to his wife, to his friends, to anyone.

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What happened to Nick Shadrin? Was he the victim of a bureaucratic foul-up or of an intentional setup?

Nick Shadrin was Nikolai Artemanov (?), the boy wonder of the Soviet Navy and its youngest destroyer captain. He defected back in 1959 with Ewa Gora, a Polish dental student.

CAPTAIN THOMAS DWYER: He was the first Soviet naval officer defector we had had since, I think, World War II.

JARRIEL: Navy Captain Thomas Dwyer was assigned to debrief Artemanov, a debriefing that quickly turned into a deep and abiding friendship.

CAPTAIN DWYER: He gave us some insight into Soviet naval operations, Soviet strategic thought that we had never had before.

JARRIEL: Artemanov went to work for the Office of Naval Intelligence. He became our eyes inside the Soviet Navy. He warned us not to abandon our surface-to-surface missile program, which we were about to do. And at a crucial point in the Cuban Missile Crisis, Artemanov told the Kennedy Administration categorically that the Soviet Navy could not reach, serve, or defend Cuba.

In 1960 a disguised Nikolai Artemanov issued a dire warning to the U.S. Congress that Russia was capable of a first nuclear strike.

NIKOLAI ARTEMANOV: I believe that Soviet dictatorship would undertake a surprise attack if they felt that she could win in one stroke.

JARRIEL: The Russians reacted with furor. They convicted him in absentia on charges of treason. His sentence was death.

Nick and Ewa were married shortly afterward, changed their name to Shadrin, and by a special act of Congress became American citizens.

Life went well of the Shadrins during those early years. Nick was using his naval expertise at work, and in his spare time earned a master's degree and a doctorate. Ewa set up a dental practice. And the Shadrins immersed themselves in Washington's social life, mixing easily with military and government elite.

Among Shadrin's early friends was Robert Kupperman, then a White House national security adviser, now Director of Georgetown's Center for Strategic and International Studies.

ROBERT KUPPERMAN: Nick was just a buoyant human being, full of life, charismatic, with an exquisite incisive mind.

CAPTAIN DWYER: He was a big bear of a man and he'd greet you with a hug that would almost crush your bones. And he had a heart that just went out to people. There was nothing that you felt he wouldn't do for his friends.

JARRIEL: But eventually any defector's information becomes outdated, obsolete. In Shadrin's case, the brilliant mind, the boundless energy, the massive ego had less and less of an outlet. By 1965 his naval intelligence contract ended. And after six degrading months of job hunting, Nick Shadrin found himself dead-ended in a low-level analyst job at the Defense Intelligence Agency.

Within months, at this moment of vulnerability, he was approached with what appeared to be a way out. After heavy pressure and without even being paid for his services, Nick Shadrin became secretly embroiled in one of the murkiest operations in the annals of espionage.

It seems that back in mid-1966 a young KGB agent known as Igor called the home of then-CIA Director Richard Helms and offered his services to penetrate the KGB. Igor held out the promise that he could be the CIA's mole in the top echelons of the KGB for decades to come. But to do that, he would have to enhance his own value to the KGB by recruiting as a double agent for his Soviet masters the one man they really wanted, Nick Shadrin.

And get him they did, through a plan devised by U.S. intelligence. Domestically, it was an FBI-run operation, with the CIA supplying doctored military intelligence reports for Soviet consumption. It was a life of cryptic phone calls and dead drops, as detailed here, carried off with such skill that neither his wife nor his closest friends suspected it.

But it was hazy from the outset because the CIA suspected all along that Igor was just a KGB plant. A high-risk intelligence fishing expedition was mounted by the FBI, using Nick Shadrin as bait.

The CIA Director in the mid-Seventies was William Colby.

Was the game of getting Igor to work with us worth the risk of losing Shadrin?

WILLIAM COLBY: Oh, after the fact, it's easy to say no. But you can't run intelligence operations without risks. And the people engaged in intelligence operations are well aware that

they're engaged in risky business.

JARRIEL: Why would a man with his background, his savvy, why would he get involved in the dangerous game of espionage?

KUPPERMAN: This is a man who experienced and exuded an intense sense of loyalty to this country and a great need to help. And I think that even though the assignments were dangerous, ultimately Nick, I think, took them just out of devotion to this country.

CAPTAIN DWYER: I say that Nick's only weakness was that he had no fear. He just felt that he was in command of every situation that he found himself in. He was a great hunter, and he always saw himself as the hunter, not the hunted. He just was fearless.

JARRIE: So fearless, in fact, that two vacations abroad with his wife involved meetings with Soviet agents. The FBI first sent him to Montreal to meet with KGB operatives in 1971.

The second trip came the following year. Incredibly, to Vienna. Just an hour's drive from Czechoslovakia and Hungary, Vienna is hardly a safe haven for a Soviet defector under a death sentence.

20/20 has learned that not only did Shadrin meet with KGB agents here, he even agreed to an overnight session inside Czechoslovakia for special training in electronics, a feat he carried off without a hitch.

The Shadrins returned to Washington. Igor reportedly vanished. And three more years of growing professional exasperation for Shadrin went by. The captain was losing control of his ship.

CAPTAIN DWYER: And I said one day, after we'd had a couple of glasses of vodka, "Nick, if you had it to do all over again, would you?"

And he just looked at me and he said [gestures], and that was all he said.

JARRIEL: Finally, in mid-December 1975, another rendezvous was set up in Vienna under the guise of a vacation. It appeared that the elusive Igor was about to resurface.

On December 17th, 1975, Ewa and Nick Shadrin checked into Vienna's elegant Bristol Hotel. Ten years, almost to the day, afterward, we returned there with Ewa Shadrin as she

recalled the bittersweet memories of that holiday season.

MRS. SHADRIN: I remember it looked like really Christmas was coming. It was cold. There was a lot of music. The stores looked beautiful, the whole shopping area. It was very, very festive. People were going with packages under their arms. It was really, really Christmas mood in Vienna.

JARRIEL: On the night of December 18th, 1975, Nick Shadrin met with two Soviet agents here on the steps of Vienna's magnificent Votive Church, one of whom, he told his wife, was the same Russian he had met with on earlier trips to Montreal and Vienna. He gave their names as Oleg Kosalov and Mikhail Kuriyashev.

The meeting that night went well. They dined together. And a second meeting with the same two KGB agents was set up for this same location for two nights later.

Back at the Bristol Hotel, Ewa waited for Nick with Nick's CIA handler, a woman who used the name Ann Martin. A high-spirited Nick Shadrin returned.

MRS. SHADRIN: The way he acted around us, he was so happy and telling us the story. He just sounded so happy.

JARRIEL: So he felt things were moving along well just two days before he disappeared.

MRS. SHADRIN: Yes. Yes.

JARRIEL: Ann Martin then took Nick Shadrin into the bathroom, apparently for a private debriefing about the meeting. They turned on the water faucet just in case the room was bugged.

The following evening the Shadrins went to the opera, across from the hotel; and unexplainably, Nick grew anxious.

MRS. SHADRIN: I could tell that he really didn't enjoy very much, that he was becoming tense. I just assumed that is because he had a meeting the following day.

JARRIEL: Nick and Ewa spent the day of the 20th sightseeing till darkness fell. Later that evening, in their hotel room, Nick Shadrin kissed his wife of 17 years good-bye. He said he had another rendezvous with his Russian contacts on the steps of the Votive Church, and that if he didn't return in time for a late dinner, she should telephone Ann Martin, his CIA contact in Vienna.

He walked through the door. It was the last Ewa Shadrin

would see or hear of Nick.

MRS. SHADRIN: I started calling the number that he left with me. It was quite late at night, it was 1:30, and nobody answered.

JARRIEL: Nobody answered because Nick's CIA handler, Ann Martin, had first gone to a dinner party and then was unaccounted for. When Martin finally picked up the receiver at the CIA safe house, the first thing she said to Ewa Shadrin was, curiously, "Have you been trying to reach me?"

MRS. SHADRIN: I said, "Nick didn't come back yet. He's not in the room yet."

And she said, "Oh, don't worry. He'll come later. Don't worry. Call me the moment he comes back."

JARRIEL: Ewa Shadrin sat up all night in the hotel room. But by daybreak, still no Nick.

MRS. SHADRIN: I called her five [unintelligible]. I was asking her, "Why don't you call the man whom he was supposed to meet?" I mean it was so natural. "Why don't you call and check if he's at home?"

She said, "We don't know his number."

JARRIEL: The square surrounding the Votive Church is ringed by buildings with windows, hundreds and hundreds of windows, any one of which could have been used for surveillance.

Most puzzling of all is that the United States Consulate had offices in that building, there in silhouette, a block away, with a view looking directly down here onto the steps of the Votive Church, where the second meeting between Shadrin and two KGB agents was to take place. Surveillance simply should not have been a problem. And yet, ten years later, the FBI and the CIA are still quarreling over whose responsibility surveillance was.

COLBY: It was an FBI case, that I get back to, that CIA was in a support role with respect to this case.

JARRIEL: Who was responsible for surveillance in Vienna?

COLBY: Well, the station there. And I don't want to go into names, but obviously the station there was responsible for the countersurveillance on it.

JARRIEL: Was anyone in that office looking down to see

if the meeting took place?

COLBY: I have no idea.

JARRIEL: Can you conceive of a major operation like this happening and someone not being curious enough to sit up there and say, "Let's see what happens"?

COLBY: You can say at this point, somebody should have watched. I don't know the details of the surveillance. It may have been called off.

JARRIEL: The mystery -- did he get away, or was he given away? -- deepens as you examine the U.S. reaction. American officials here in Vienna showed no urgency in notifying Austrian authorities that Shadrin had vanished. 20/20 has learned that the Austrian state police weren't even notified of Shadrin's disappearance for four days. And it took ten days before U.S. authorities even filed a routine missing persons reports. It was done then at the request of the Austrians.

We've also learned that the Austrian Interior Ministry received a casual telephone call on December 24th from an American consular official saying a woman who called herself Ewa Shadrin had phoned the consulate claiming her husband had vanished and that she was leaving the country for fear of her own safety. But we've learned Ewa Shadrin had already left Vienna by then, at CIA insistence, without making any phone calls at all.

Dr. Robert Danzinger is currently Director of the Austrian State Security Police.

Had the American authorities notified the Austrian authorities sooner -- in other words, immediately after Shadrin apparently disappeared on the 20th -- could your authorities have conducted perhaps a better investigation?

DR. ROBERT DANZINGER [translated]: In principle, one can say that the earlier a security officer obtains information about a case, the greater the chance of clearing up that case.

JARRIEL: And most disturbing of all, 20/20 has learned that Nick Shadrin's cover in Vienna, that of a tourist, was blown by U.S. authorities before he ever arrived on December 17th, because on the 16th a letter had been left for him at the hotel marked "American Embassy, Consular Section. Dr. Nicholas Shadrin. Official Business."

In a city where intelligence operatives are everywhere, Nick Shadrin had arrived in Vienna a marked man, an American citizen under a Soviet death sentence, sent out alone at night to

the KGB, an hour from the East Bloc, apparently unprotected.

In your view, was Nicholas Shadrin betrayed?

COLBY: No, I don't think he was betrayed. I think he was kidnaped. I think the other side wanted him, set up a first meeting to make sure he was there and would come, then set up a second meeting. And at that point, it was determined that they would grab him. And they did.

JARRIEL: As for Ewa Shadrin, first told to go home, now back in Washington, she was told to keep quiet and wait for more information.

MRS. SHADRIN: I never got any informations. Everybody was sort of [unintelligible]. They did only whatever they did because we were pressing them to do it.

KUPPERMAN: She wanted a meeting with the President. She wanted a meeting with the CIA Director. She wanted a meeting with a variety -- just to reassure a human being that the U.S. Government was trying to do something helpful. She wasn't getting it.

At very high levels in the White House, I was getting political warnings about "cool it." But Nick's my friend, and I just couldn't do that.

CAPTAIN DWYER: It could mean that it was bureaucratic callousness. It could mean that there was some sort of a trade arranged, of Nick Shadrin for some future benefit from the other side. I really -- I do not know for sure.

JARRIEL: If you went out on a mission and you vanished, would you expect your wife to be treated this way?

COLBY: I went out on a mission and I vanished for about a week, and nobody told anybody.

JARRIEL: But if you were gone for ten years.

COLBY: Well, maybe. I think I would have been reported missing, period.

JARRIEL: Over the years, the Soviets stonewalled, as well. Each time Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin was called to the White House over the years, his reply was, "Don't ask me that question. Don't bring it up."

Then, finally, a stunning Soviet counterattack in the press. The Soviets claimed that Shadrin had never shown up here at the Votive Church for that second meeting at all. And most

disconcerting of all, the Soviets claimed the CIA killed Shadrin after the United States Government learned their prize military catch wanted to return to his motherland.

The Russians have said, flatly, that the meeting never took place on the steps of the Votive Church...

COLBY: Well, I don't believe a word the Russians say.

JARRIEL: Well, it sounds like they were watching things.

COLBY: Well, they may well have. But I would believe them, what they would say, at all.

JARRIEL: But if they can say the meeting didn't take place, we can't deny that, can we?

COLBY: We can't deny it, but we don't have to believe it.

JARRIEL: Finally, on October 27th of last year, almost ten years after Shadrin vanished, the first official notice. Two FBI agents appeared at Ewa Shadrin's doorstep.

MRS. SHADRIN: They had sullen faces. And after they pause, one of them told me that they are coming to bring me bad news, that Nick is dead, and they know it as a fact beyond any reasonable doubt.

JARRIEL: High-level CIA sources have told 20/20 that Soviet defector/redefector Vitaly Yurchenko was the source of new information on Shadrin's alleged death, a charge Yurchenko heatedly denied.

VITALY YURCHENKO [translated]: Those newspaper reports about Shadrin, that he'd been killed, I asked the head of the CIA's Soviet desk, "Aren't you ashamed of this?" Because I don't know anything about Shadrin.

JARRIEL: The data he was said to have supplied was included in a secret cable of protest sent from the U.S. State Department to Moscow outlining for the first time ever Shadrin's last hours. He, quote, was abducted by representatives of the Soviet intelligence service, the KGB, in Vienna.

MRS. SHADRIN: "We have also reliably learned that during the abduction of Shadrin a chemical substance was forcefully administered to him, rendering him unconscious. Shadrin was driven by representatives of the KGB from Vienna toward the Hungarian border, but died before reaching the border, apparently

10

as a direct result of the chemical substance forcefully applied to render him unconscious."

JARRIEL: When you read the State Department cable, what went through your mind?

MRS. SHADRIN: I thought that Soviet, if they would get him through the border alive, he would be tortured, not only physically, but maybe mentally. And maybe -- maybe it was better what happened, that he didn't have to suffer.

JARRIEL: What could, what should you have been told about all this? What did you deserve to know, as his wife?

MRS. SHADRIN: I think I should have been told truth, and then it would be much easier to go the life.

JARRIEL: What could be so important as to not tell you?

MRS. SHADRIN: They probably have something to hide, why they decided not to tell the truth.

JARRIEL: What's the moral of the Shadrin story? What have we learned from this?

KUPPERMAN: I think we learned something about bureaucracy. We've learned something about cowardice, in my mind. We learned something about a very shabby way in which when bureaucracies are threatened, that we treat human beings whom we have placed in extraordinarily difficult positions. And we've learned, it seems to me, that politics often reigns over humanity.

DOWNS: Tom, I don't think I understand exactly why they didn't tell Mrs. Shadrin. You know, what aspect of security could be jeopardized by not telling a widow the fate of her husband?

JARRIEL: The best answer came a few years ago in a legal proceeding, Hugh. A federal judge was predisposed to put out more information about the Shadrin case when he was asked to. The CIA rushed in and showed him the entire file. The judge then agreed with the CIA that telling more about this case might indeed compromise ongoing intelligence-gathering operations.

So, even today, this Machiavellian trial might still be unfolding.

DOWNS: That proves it's a rough business, isn't it?

JARRIEL: It certainly is.

11

DOWNS: I know what they mean by being out in the cold.

Thank you, Tom.